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AUTHOR	Sampson, James P., Jr.; Carr, Darrin L.; Panke, Julia; Arkin, Scott; Vernick, Stacie H.; Minvielle, Meagan
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ABSTRACT

Web sites that support counseling and the use of self-help resources are often used as an integral part of services delivered by organizations. Given the organizational context of these Web sites, effective implementation of these sites within organizations contributes to the overall quality of available resources and services. This document presents a seven-step model for implementing Internet Web sites within organizations that deliver counseling and self-help resources. It beings with a discussion of the use of implementation models to enhance service delivery and continues with a description of a seven-step implementation process and an acknowledgment of the continuing nature of implementation. It concludes with suggestions for maximizing staff collaboration in implementation. (Contains 12 references, 1 table, and 1 figure.) (Author)

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by
James P. Sampson,Jr.
Darrin L. Carr
Julia Panke
Scott Arkin
Stacie H. Vernick
Meagan Minvielle

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Chapter Twelve

Implementing Internet Web Sites in Counseling Services

James P. Sampson, Jr., Darrin L. Carr, Julia Panke, Scott Arkin, Stacie H. Vernick, Meagan Minvielle

Counseling can be delivered in a face-to-face mode as well as in a distance mode using the telephone or the Internet (National Board for Certified Counselors and the Center for Credentialing and Education, 2001). Internet Web sites can support counseling provided to clients as well as support self-help resources provided to individuals. Potential contributions of Web sites to counseling can include marketing counseling services to potential clients, orienting clients to counseling, delivering assessments, and delivering information used as homework assigned to clients (Sampson, 2000; Sampson, Kolodinsky, & Greeno, 1997). Web sites can also be used to help clients understand and gain access to distance counseling. Web sites can support the delivery of self-help resources to individuals by providing access to self-assessments, by providing access to information, by indicating when counseling may be needed, and by providing help features that link users to immediate assistance when needed (Offer & Sampson, 1999).

Web sites that support counseling and the use of self-help resources are often used as an integral part of services delivered by organizations. Given the organizational context of these Web sites, effective implementation of these sites within organizations contributes to the overall quality of available resources and services. This chapter presents a seven-step model for implementing Internet Web sites within organizations that deliver counseling and self-help resources. The chapter begins with a discussion of the use of implementation models to enhance service delivery and continues with a description of a seven-step implementation process and an acknowledgement of the continuing nature of implementation. The chapter concludes with suggestions for maximizing staff collaboration in implementation.

The Use of Implementation Models to Enhance Service Delivery

Experience with computer applications in counseling and career services has shown that poor implementation limits the effectiveness of

service delivery. Specific implementation problems have included poor planning, poor integration of computer applications within service delivery organizations, inadequate staff training, and staff anxiety and resistance (Sampson, 1984; 1996; Sampson & Norris, 1997). The purpose of an implementation guide is to reduce complexity thereby making the process comprehensible enough to motivate practitioners toward investing the necessary time and energy in implementation. Ultimately, more effective implementation can lead to better use of higher quality resources and services by clients and individuals.

The authors favor the implementation model described in this chapter because it has four potential strengths. First, the model is intended to be flexible enough to be partially or completely applied, depending on the staff time available. Second, the model can be used to support both initial and ongoing Web site implementation. If the Web site is being implemented for the first time, this model can be used as a starting point for the design and use of the site. If the Web site already exists, this model can be used to consider options for enhancing the design and use of the site. Third, the implementation model is designed to account for differences among each counseling and career service's clients, staff, organization and resources. Finally, practitioners can use this model as a starting point for creating a brief (or more complete) implementation plan for a specific counseling or career service. We believe that it is better to create a brief plan that improves over time, rather than overwhelming practitioners with an unrealistic implementation plan that leads to frustration when goals are not achieved.

The inherent assumptions of this implementation model are that: 1) Good planning improves the design and use of Web sites; 2) Some planning is better than no planning at all; and 3) Implementation is a continuing process that can improve over time. The seven sequential steps of the implementation model are noted in Figure 1 and are described below. The size of the box for each of the seven steps in Figure 1 indicates the relative time and effort that is needed for each step.

A Seven-Step Web Site Implementation Process

The Web site implementation model described in the following section includes: 1) program evaluation, 2) Web site development, 3) Web site integration, 4) staff training, 5) trial use, 6) operation, and 7) evaluation.

Program Evaluation

This step provides the foundation for the implementation process, helping to ensure that the Web site is used for the right reasons by the right clients. The process begins with an evaluation of how well the current

resources and services of the organization are meeting the needs of clients and individuals. If the evaluation indicates that a change in resources or service delivery is necessary, then the features of typical Web sites are reviewed. If a new or revised Web site seems appropriate, the organization then prepares for the implementation process by establishing an implementation committee and a Web site coordinator to guide the process. An implementation plan is prepared and support is sought from stakeholders and administrators for the use of the Web site.

Web Site Development

Using the above program evaluation data, this step helps to ensure that the Web site developed has the potential to effectively meet client and organizational needs. The process begins with preparation for Web site development (reviewing other designs and agreeing on staffing and budgeting). Next, the staff of the organization collaboratively develops the content of the site. Audiences, needs, and related resources can be delineated using the exercises in Panke, Carr, Arkin, & Sampson (2001). The next step in the process is the development of Web site features. Here decisions are made about design features, which are prototyped, evaluated, revised, and then implemented. See Sampson, Carr, Panke, Arkin, Minvielle, & Vernick (2001) for recommendations on Web site design. Elements of the "Develop Web Site Features" phase can be initiated while the "Develop Web Site Content" phase is being completed. When the site becomes operational, users, staff, and stakeholders evaluate Web site content and features. Finally, the ongoing documentation of the site is completed as the site becomes finalized for initial release.

Web Site Integration

Given the Web site developed in the previous step, staff now plan how to integrate Web site use in a way that is congruent with the way in which resources and services are delivered within the organization. The process begins with the staff reviewing current needs and current resources and services. All staff become familiar with the Web site and then evaluate how the system "fits" with existing or new services. A plan is then developed for connecting the Web site with other organizational resources and services. The roles of all staff members are examined, including specific professional, paraprofessional, and clerical support staff interventions with clients. Operational procedures are determined, and a plan for evaluating Web site use is prepared.

Staff Training

Staff are now given the training necessary to integrate the Web site with existing service delivery. The process begins with developing a plan for training. Professionals, paraprofessionals, and clerical support staff then receive specific training that is appropriate for their role in delivering services. Administrators and stakeholders are then familiarized with Web site features and use. The effectiveness of training is then evaluated with plans made for future training activities.

Trial Use

The effectiveness of the Web site in actual practice, based on the software integration and staff training efforts completed above, is evaluated with a group of trial users. (In this paper, "users" refers to either clients using a Web site as part of a counseling intervention or individuals who are using a counseling or career center Web site as a self-help resource.) The process begins with an identification of trial users from the audiences that the Web site is intended to reach. As trial users explore the Web site, their observations and critiques are recorded and evaluated. Based on observations and interviews of trial users, the Web site design, staff roles, operational procedures, and training efforts are modified as needed.

Operation

Building upon the experience gained in the trial period, the Web site is used as one component of the total service delivery effort of the organization. Audience members have daily access to the Web site and the resources and services that it presents. Staff members continuously maintain the Web site's content and features. Evaluation data is collected and public relations efforts continue. Responding to this data and feedback from public relations campaigns provides an important source of evaluative data that can be used in the next step.

Evaluation

Building upon the experience gained during operation, results of the evaluation are used to indicate needed improvements in Web site design and use. Information gained in this step is then used in the refinement of service delivery. Depending on the nature of the evaluation results obtained and the resulting changes that are needed, the implementation process cycles back via feedback loops to program evaluation, Web site development, Web site integration, or staff training, followed by trial use and continuing operation of the Web site. December (1996) noted that the innovation process entails the continuous cycle of making changes to the site to achieve the evolving needs of users.

Specific components of each of the seven steps of the model are presented in Table 1. The implementation committee and Web site coordinator can review this checklist and select the components of the Web site implementation plan that are appropriate for the organization. Details of each of the seven steps of the model are presented in Sampson et al. (2001).

The Continuing Nature of Implementation

Implementation is an on-going process. Counseling and career services offered to individuals evolve in response to changes in public policy, individual needs, funding, organizational development, and available assessment and information resources. Web sites are also constantly evolving in response to changes in organizations and technology. As a result of the above factors, the implementation process never actually ends. The amount of time and effort required for implementation does vary over time, ranging from a considerable investment for a new or substantially revised Web site to occasional minimal investment for an established Web site that is functioning well in the organization. Implementation thus becomes an integral part of regular staff planning, training, and evaluation activities.

Maximizing Staff Collaboration in Implementation

According to Holtz (1998), teams composed of members from throughout the organization are more effective in achieving Web site management goals. Such teams can benefit from the diverse strengths of each member. In such a situation, the team can effectively establish the content of the site, after which information technology professionals can offer technical solutions to problems identified. Thus, the success of an organization's Web site is largely dependent upon the involvement of individuals with different functions and from different disciplines (Marken, 1995). Having a Web site team allows for the control of a Web site to be diffused throughout the organization and limits the ability of any single person to dominate the site. Active participation of staff members in design and implementation helps staff to better understand and support the goals of the Web site, operationalizing the old adage, "people support what they help create."

Conclusion

The seven-step implementation model shown in Figure 1 and outlined in Table 1, simplifies a complex process and aids staff in anticipating important issues (e.g., ownership of site content). In short, it helps staff to

proactively design a sequence of activities which can result in the successful implementation of a comprehensive Web site. By better anticipating problems and issues before they occur, less time is then needed for solving problems that could have been avoided (Sampson et al, 2001). Improved Web site implementation makes it more likely that organizations can use Web sites to meet the needs of the clients and individuals they serve.

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Table 1
A Checklist for Creating Effective Web Sites Using a Seven-Step Implementation Model

Program Evaluation

Evaluate currently available resources and services

- ❑ Review the needs of clients and individuals
- ❑ Review currently available assessment, information, and learning resources
- ❑ Review services which help clients effectively use available resources
- ❑ Identify needs of clients and individuals that are met effectively with current resources and services
- ❑ Identify limitations in current resources and services in effectively meeting client and individual needs
- ❑ Review the potential content and features of Web sites
- ❑ Identify how a Web site can enhance current successes and reduce limitations in resources/services

Prepare for implementing a Web site

- ❑ Create an implementation committee and choose a Web site coordinator
- ❑ Prepare a plan for implementing the Web site
- ❑ Identify stakeholders and administrators who can provide support for improved services

Web Site Development

Prepare for Web site development

- ❑ Review examples of Web sites having various features
- ❑ Agree on staff responsibilities and budget

Develop Web site content

- ❑ For each audience identified, describe needs and related information resources based on the program evaluation step above
- ❑ For each link clarifying user needs, create a descriptive title and learning outcome
- ❑ For each information resource, develop specific help content as needed
- ❑ Develop general help information and organizational information to be included on the site
- ❑ Edit all content for clarity and consistency

- ❑ Review all content for congruence with professional standards of practice

Design Web site features

- ❑ Agree on Web site features
- ❑ Agree on the format for presentation of text (information chunking, page length, limited memory demands, readability, accessibility and menu item ordering, etc.)
- ❑ Agree on format for presentation of graphics (effective use of icons/symbols and photographs)
- ❑ Select Web site development and delivery software
- ❑ Create page design (header, footer, fonts, colors, clarification of path chosen, style sheets, etc.)
- ❑ Create templates for clarification of audience, clarification of needs, and delivery of information
- ❑ Create pages and establish links among pages
- ❑ Create resource-based tools (Search, Site Map, and Index)

Evaluate Web site content and features

- ❑ Conduct usability testing (observation of users)
- ❑ Survey perceptions of audiences, staff, and stakeholders
- ❑ Select software for tracking of Web site usage

Complete site documentation (authorship, design strategies, and technical specifications)

Web Site Integration

Prepare for integrating the Web site with existing or new resources and services

- ❑ Review the needs of clients, staff, and your organization
- ❑ Review current resources and services provided to your clients
- ❑ Discuss theory and practice issues among staff to generate ideas about existing or new services to help clients and individuals use the Web site
- ❑ Review relevant professional standards to generate ideas about the quality of services provided to clients
- ❑ Familiarize all staff with Web site features and operation
  Decide how the Web site will be used in delivering services
- ❑ Decide how the Web site can be used with other assessment, information, and learning resources

- ❑ Decide how counselors, paraprofessionals, and support staff can help clients effectively use the Web site
- ❑ Decide how the Web site might support collaboration with other service providers

Decide how the Web site will operate

- ❑ Decide how the Web site will be used by clients on computers in the counseling/career center
- ❑ Develop procedures for scheduling client use of the Web site if appointments are used
- ❑ Develop a plan for evaluating Web site effectiveness
- ❑ Revise public relations efforts to include the Web site
- ❑ Communicate progress with stakeholders and administrators who can provide support

Staff Training

- ❑ Develop a plan for staff training
- ❑ Train professionals, paraprofessionals, and support staff
- ❑ Familiarize administrators and stakeholders with Web site design and use
- ❑ Evaluate training effectiveness and plan future training
- ❑ Continue staff training as needed

Trial Use

- ❑ Identify trial users
- ❑ Begin trial use of the system
- ❑ Observe and interview trial users to identify the strengths and limitations of Web site design and integration
- ❑ Revise staff roles and operational procedures as needed
- ❑ Continue staff training as needed
- ❑ Continue public relations efforts

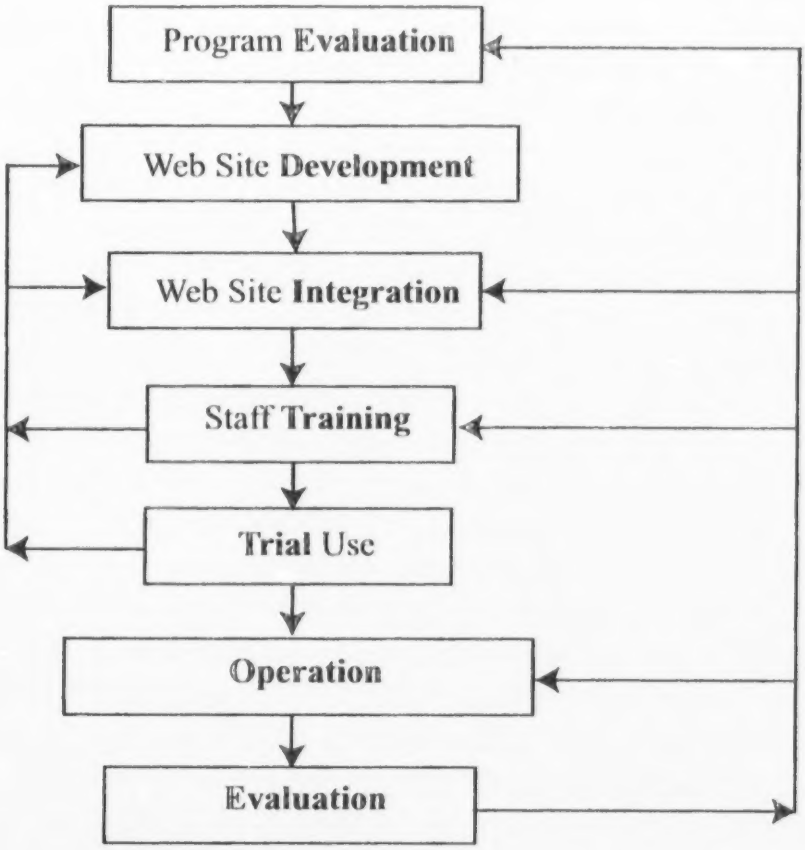
Operation

- ❑ Operate the Web site
- ❑ Collect evaluation data
- ❑ Continue public relations efforts

Evaluation

- ❑ Evaluate the design and use of the Web site in service delivery
- ❑ Refine Web site design and use based on evaluation results

Figure 1. The Seven Step Implementation Model



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